

**CONFERENCE TO THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE RENOVATION OF VOWS
Motherhouse, Paris, 25 March 2022**

Sister Françoise, Father Bernard, my very dear Sisters, I am so happy to be with you today. We have not had the opportunity to gather like this in quite some time. I had planned to come here three times at the beginning of last year, on 1 January, 2 February, and 25 March, but the Covid-19 pandemic upended those plans. Another unforeseen occurrence prevented me from coming to Paris on 2 February of this year. Now, finally, I can spend these few moments with you.

I propose to address two topics today: 1) the follow-up to your General Assembly, and 2) some branches of the Vincentian Family. After I finish my presentation, I would like to offer you, in the time that remains, the opportunity to ask questions or make comments.

As you know, you had a wonderful General Assembly last October and November. There was a very participatory and peaceful atmosphere, which made much fruitful dialogue possible, leading to a proposal for the Inter-Assemblies Document, of which the General Council has completed the final version.

However, from experience, I know that, frequently, out of sight is out of mind. Several months have passed since the closure of the Assembly and many other events have intervened. It could be that you barely remember those wonderful days in November. It would be a shame if all the hard work put into preparing for and conducting that Assembly were forgotten. Fortunately, in due time, you will receive the Inter-Assemblies Document, which you will then use to elaborate your Provincial Plans and, from those, your Local Community Plans. In that way, you will have before your eyes over the next six years, the results produced by the Assembly members. It is a grace that the Company has in place this excellent trajectory to assure that the efforts made and the decisions reached during the General Assembly are not overlooked or neglected.

Let me simply encourage you to keep alive the spirit of the Assembly. In particular, I ask that you continue to focus on the four topics that marked, in a special way, the discussions that were held there; that is, human rights and holistic development for those most abandoned in society, care for our “common home,” “living together” in fraternal community, and passing on the faith and Christian values to younger generations. These are very important not only for the Company, but also for the whole Church and society in general.

As I mentioned in my opening address to the General Assembly, the first of those topics, human rights and holistic development for those most abandoned in society, touches the very essence of your vocation: the service of Christ in the person of the poor. Nevertheless, it can sometimes be very frustrating to see the needs of the poor, but be unable to respond to them, as you would like to do. In this case, you are obliged, while continuing to do everything you can for them, to place them in God’s hands. This is what Saint Vincent did when he could not respond to the

sufferings of the galley slaves, as he wanted to do. “I can only be deeply grieved by the intense sufferings of the poor slaves and by my inability to procure some relief for them; may it please God to have pity on them!”¹

In spite of your inability, at times, to relieve the suffering of the less fortunate, you must and do continue striving to help them find a way out of their conditions of poverty. The systemic-change method is a marvelous tool for doing this. In using it, you teach those who are poor how to help themselves, how to address their own needs, where to seek assistance. More importantly, you instruct them in the best ways to stand up for their rights and seek justice in response to their needs and circumstances.

Care for our “common home” is a theme so dear to the heart of the Holy Father that five years after devoting his first encyclical, *Laudato si’*, to it, he proposed a seven-year action platform to address integral ecology. The care of creation comes under the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, but the action platform has its own website (<https://laudatosi.actionplatform.org/>), which provides resources to communities and individuals to participate in integral ecology.

As we all know, there is no dearth of problems on our planet. In addition to climate change, we can cite war, poverty, racism, inequality, injustice, and many more. It would be difficult to single out one of those as the most critical problem. However, it has been said that climate change is it, because it affects all living creatures and, if it is not sufficiently addressed, and on a global scale, within this decade, we may reach a point of no return. That is why care for our common home and integral ecology must be tackled in the here and now. We must not forget either that climate change affects the poor and vulnerable of our brothers and sisters more than those who are well to do. As servants of the poor, therefore, you surely will want to care for our common home, because, in doing so, you also are caring for the least fortunate in society.

The members of the General Assembly also discussed the theme of “living together” in fraternal community. We all are aware of what a challenge this can be. It is said that you can choose your friends, but not your relatives. Those of us who live in community cannot choose our companions either. Thus, we can end up with a mix of personalities and cultures in any given house. Whenever a new person is added or removed from that house, the situation changes. It takes time to build relationships and become a united local community. Saint Louise and Saint Vincent had a suggestion for making that possible. At a Council Meeting in 1647, Saint Louise asked Saint Vincent,

“Father, there’s something to be said now about the way our Sisters should act when they’re together. Wouldn’t Your Charity consider it advisable for them to

¹ *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume VII, p. 523; letter 2819 to Jean Le Vacher, Consul in Tunis, 18 April 1659. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials *CCD*, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, *CCD VII, 523*.

spend some time together each day-half an hour or so to share with one another what they've done and the problems they've encountered, and to talk over what they'll have to do?"

He replied,

*"O mon Dieu! yes! ..., that's a real need: close communication with one another; sharing everything. Nothing is more necessary. It unites hearts, and God blesses the advice received, with the result that things go better. Every day at recreation you can say, 'How did things go with you, Sister? Such and such happened to me today; what do you think about it?' You can't imagine what pleasant conversation this makes. When, on the contrary, each one does her own thing, saying nothing about it, that's intolerable So, Sister, that's a real need: nothing should happen, nothing should be done or said, unless each of you knows it. You must have this mutuality."*²

For her part, Louise also had a suggestion that would help to promote harmony in a local community. In 1652, the first group of Sisters were established in Poland. Three years later, another three were sent to join them. Louise reminded the former that,

*My dear Sisters, you have always assured me that although you are three persons, you are but one in heart; in the name of the most Holy Trinity that you have so honored and must continue to honor, I beg you to open wide this heart to allow our three sisters to enter into this cordial union so that the last three arrivals will be indistinguishable from those who arrived first. I assure you that they are coming with these dispositions and with the sole desire of pleasing God. They are all without any attachment to their own satisfaction, just as you are, my dear Sisters. This does not mean that nature does not at times provide even the most perfect with occasions for struggle, but you realize that this is to test the fidelity of souls desirous of belonging completely to God. Do not be surprised then, my dear Sisters, when such a thing happens; rather this is a time when our souls must be moved, despite the weakness of our nature, to practice heroic virtue by spontaneous acts of humility and gentleness of heart and to prove that we desire to be truly Christian. Thus we will honor Jesus Christ by practicing the virtues which He, Himself, in His holy humanity, taught us. May I ask something of you, my dear Sisters, which seems very necessary to me? It is that you never speak Polish among yourselves without letting our sisters know what you are saying. This will help them to learn the language more quickly and will prevent other problems which could arise if you acted otherwise.*³

² CCD XIIIb, 281; document 160, Council of 20 June 1647.

³ *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac, Correspondence and Thoughts*. Edited and Translated from the French by Louise Sullivan, DC; New City Press, Brooklyn, 1991, p. 478; letter 447 to Sisters Marguerite, Madeleine, and Françoise, Warsaw, 19 August 1655.

Those of you who live here in the Motherhouse or on a foreign mission might do well to heed Louise's advice about the use of another language. However, for the majority of Daughters of Charity, the use of different languages does not exist. Nevertheless, Saint Louise surely would want you to extend her thinking to other circumstances, such as, adapting to a companion's moods, demands, habits, etc. We sometimes have to make heroic efforts to "live together" peacefully. This requires much patience, humility, and charity.

The fourth theme that was an object of much discussion at the General Assembly was passing on the faith and Christian values to younger generations. We know well that, since the pontificate of Saint John Paul II, the Church has made considerable strides in reaching out to the young. The biennial World Youth Days are a testimony to that. While these are held on a universal level every two years, countries are encouraged to host their own such gathering in the intervening years. I am sure that some of you have accompanied groups of young people to these events and know how much they arouse the participants' energy and enthusiasm.

Nevertheless, as enjoyable and enriching as World Youth Days are, young people need more sustained accompaniment in order to grow in their faith. They need regular moments of prayer, including times of silence before the Blessed Sacrament, *Lectio Divina*, reciting the Liturgy of the Hours or the rosary together, and frequent participation in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These may come natural to those who are from a family with a strong religious background. However, many others are "on their own" when it comes to prayer and worship. Therefore, they will depend on people like you to lead and guide them.

Those of you who are involved in direct service of young people, especially teachers, will have many opportunities to be present to them, responding to their questions, and challenging them to live their faith in service to others. Those who have little or no contact with youth will have to make efforts to reach out to them. Fortunately, our Vincentian Family has several wonderful associations that can help in this regard.

This leads to my second concern dealing with the Vincentian Family. As many of you know, I am sure, the Superior General serves as Director General of three of the lay branches: the Association of the Miraculous Medal (AMM), the Vincentian Marian Youth (VMY), and the Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI).

The Association of the Miraculous Medal has thousands, perhaps millions, of members throughout the world. Its focus is prayer and the promotion of devotion to Our Lady through the Miraculous Medal. It is a public association of the faithful, composed of laity, clergy, and members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life who wear the Miraculous Medal and honor it with a Christian and apostolic life, each member doing so according to his/her state of life. Working together, they seek to foster a better life in communion with others, and accomplish apostolic activities through spreading the 1830 message of the Blessed Virgin to Saint Catherine Labouré. Anyone can belong to this

Association. It is primarily a prayer association, but also encourages some assistance to or service of the less fortunate.

Like the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Vincentian Marian Youth grew out of the apparitions to Saint Catherine Labouré here at the Rue du Bac in 1830. Its first name was Children of Mary and, of course, it continues to retain the Marian aspect. The members are young people. The association seeks to form them to live a solid faith, following Jesus Christ; to live and pray like Mary in simplicity and humility assuming the spirituality of the Magnificat; to foster, animate, and maintain the missionary spirit; and to prepare them individually and communally to collaborate in the Church and society with other pastoral workers.

The members of VMY carry out different apostolic activities from their own centers and in coordination with parishes or other branches of the Vincentian Family. Among these are:

- a) Socio-charitable service: collaboration and support in the social work of the Daughters of Charity, regular visits to the sick and the poor in their respective homes, work in the marginalized and rural areas with disadvantaged groups (children, young people with adaptation concerns, women and immigrants, etc.).
- b) Evangelization: support in parish catechism (for children, young people, and adults), activities for the evangelization of young people (workshops, gatherings, etc.), support in the popular missions organized by the Congregation of the Mission.

As is obvious, this association is excellent for involving young people in faith and service. It has thousands of members in approximately half the world's countries and has National Statutes in many of those. The headquarters of its International Secretariat just moved from Madrid to Manila. In both those cities, it has been able to count on the support and assistance of the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

The Lay Vincentian Missionaries are of more recent origin. They respond to the appeal of Vatican II that reminds us that, by the nature of our baptism, we are all called to holiness and mission. Growing primarily out of the Vincentian Marian Youth, in the beginning their principal goal was the missions *Ad Gentes*. Now, however, MISEVI embraces both local and foreign missions. This association is growing, but remains much smaller than the two previously mentioned.

Hundreds of MISEVI members are working in short-term or long-term missions. Some go to any part of the world and some share the Gospel in their home countries. They are involved in such activities as: evangelization, teaching and literacy programs, programs for refugees and the homeless, programs for those with disabilities and special needs, health care, special programs for literacy and empowerment of women, listening centers for victims of alcohol and violence, child care, youth ministries in dioceses with the local Church, formation of pastoral groups, visits to jails and prisons, etc.

I bring up these three associations because I would like to encourage you to promote and support them. A Daughter of Charity from the General Council is a member of the International Council of each association. On the national level, Daughters of Charity serve as advisors on the National Councils of each one and many Sisters work with the associations' members on the local level. Because each one, directly or indirectly, grew out of the apparitions of Our Lady to Saint Catherine, it is natural that you would promote and support them.

Therefore, I ask you to continue developing these three associations on the provincial and local levels in your respective countries. If, however, one, two, or even all three are not present in your area, then I request that you make efforts to establish them. All the associations have international websites, where you can find information on how to do this. Please feel free to work in collaboration with our confreres. I often have encouraged them too to develop and support these three associations.

I also would like to mention two other associations, which are important members of our large Vincentian Family; that is, the International Association of Charities (AIC) and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society (SSVdP). As you know, AIC is the oldest member of our Vincentian Family, even older than the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. In many countries, the Daughters of Charity work closely with both associations, often serving as advisors on their local or national councils. I am very grateful for this collaboration and urge you to continue to foster it.

If you have any problems or questions with regard to promoting and supporting AMM, VMY, and MISEVI, you may turn directly to me as their Director General. Should there be financial or other reasons, which make establishing one or another of these associations difficult, we will try our best to help. I very much want to see these associations established and developed in countries or regions where they are not at present. I count on each of you, wherever possible, to assist in this task.

All three associations can serve to strengthen young people in their faith, teach them the value of service to others, and help them become committed members of the Catholic Church, promoting its values in a world badly in need of them. We know that many young people are idealistic. They seek to live more simply, avoiding the pitfalls of our consumer-driven society, caring for all creation, and assisting those in need. By reaching out to them, you can show them how to achieve those goals and thereby promote a more just and peaceful social order.

Finally, on a more personal note, I ask you to keep our upcoming General Assembly in your prayer. As you may know, it will be held from 27 June to 15 July in Rome. The Preparatory Commission has worked hard to make sure that everything is in place for the smooth running of this important event. Of course, there remain a few last-minute details to resolve. However, at this point, we count most of all on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit during the proceedings, which is why I beg the assistance of your prayer.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM
Superior General